

VZCZCXRO1362
OO RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHLM #1129 3431256
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 091256Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0957
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2149
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9183
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7428
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5287
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3581
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5217
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0085
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0752
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4334
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9743
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7034
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0073
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3896
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001129

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: RED ROVER: PARTY MEMBERS START CROSSING OVER

REF: COLOMBO 744

Classified By: CHARGE D' AFFAIRES VALERIE C. FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) On December 7, senior UNP leader S.B. Dissanayake resigned from his position as National Organizer for the UNP and his position as opposition leader of the Central Province provincial council. Local observers have noted in the past that Dissanayake was a possible presidential candidate (Reftel). Dissanayake stated in a press conference on December 7 and in a meeting with poloff on December 8 that he left the UNP because he was extremely frustrated with the leadership of UNP chief Ranil Wickremesinghe, including his decision to support General Sarath Fonseka as the opposition's candidate instead of running a UNP presidential candidate. Dissanayake told poloff that his frustration with Wickremesinghe increased when the UNP party leader refused the requests of a significant number of UNP party members to choose Dissanayake as the UNP's presidential candidate instead of supporting Fonseka's candidacy.

¶2. (C) Dissanayake also told poloff that the president and his two brothers had intensely lobbied him to support the SLFP government and that Basil Rajapaksa (senior advisor to the President) informed Dissanayake on December 8 that the president was feeling more confident about the upcoming presidential election since Dissanayake's announcement.

¶3. (C) Local embassy contacts have responded by discounting the impact of Dissanayake's crossover. Center for Policy Alternatives senior researcher Asanga Welikala told poloff that Dissanayake was unlikely to bring over significant vote banks with him and that his defection would be largely symbolic. Senior SLMC leader A.M. Faaiz echoed Welikala's comments by noting Dissanayake's crossover had not created concern in the opposition and would not affect the opposition's political thinking in any way.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Dissanayake's crossover is unlikely to have a major impact on the presidential race. While Dissanayake

brings to the SLPF certain political advantages, given his widely respected strength as a campaigner, he is unlikely to dent the opposition in any meaningful way. Known for his political ambition, Dissanayake's crossover probably was the result of a long-standing feud with Wickremesinghe, rather than his public rhetoric over the demise of democracy in Sri Lanka. Dissanayake's crossover may be the start of a number of crossovers during the presidential campaign. Unlike other crossovers, however, Dissanayake may not struggle to win a parliamentary seat in the general election due in early 2010;

his role as a former senior leader within the ruling SLFP probably still grants him a certain level of gravitas that other crossovers will struggle to emulate.

FOWLER